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Experiences of life

Cesare Negrini:

The story of a man for dialogue

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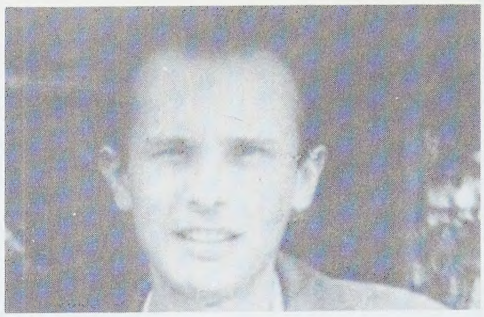

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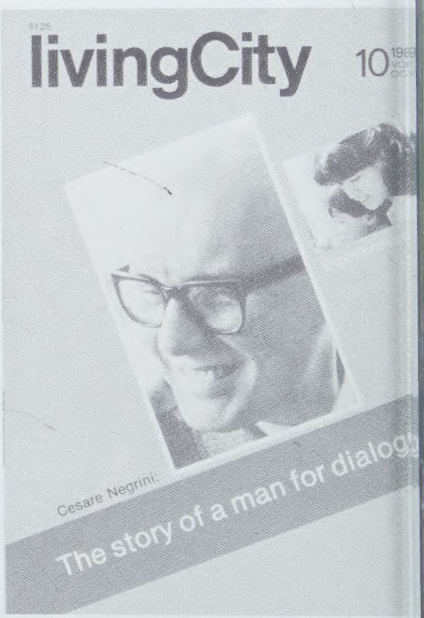

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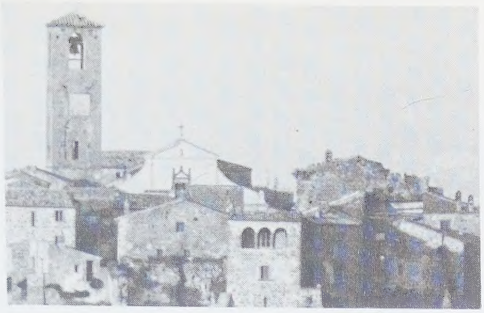

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CESARE NEGRINI: THE STORY OF A MAN FOR DIALOGUE

THE VIOLENCE THAT STORMS HEAVEN

"One thing I have learned for certain: that love drives away fear, and that for those who have embraced love, fear becomes a fault."

by CLAUDIO CASOLI

Cesare Negrini left us last February. He had joined the Focolare Movement in 1949 and was a married focolarino. Held in high esteem by all of us for the wisdom and the balance of his judgments, for the solidity of his faith, and above all for his mild character, he had a way of somehow vanishing among the most quiet and the shiest in our midst. One would have said that he was quiet, peace-loving and peace-giving man by nature, but these character traits were not at all natural to him. He had acquired them when his whole previous life changed as the result of a religious conversion. His past was indeed quite different.

(Continued on page 4)

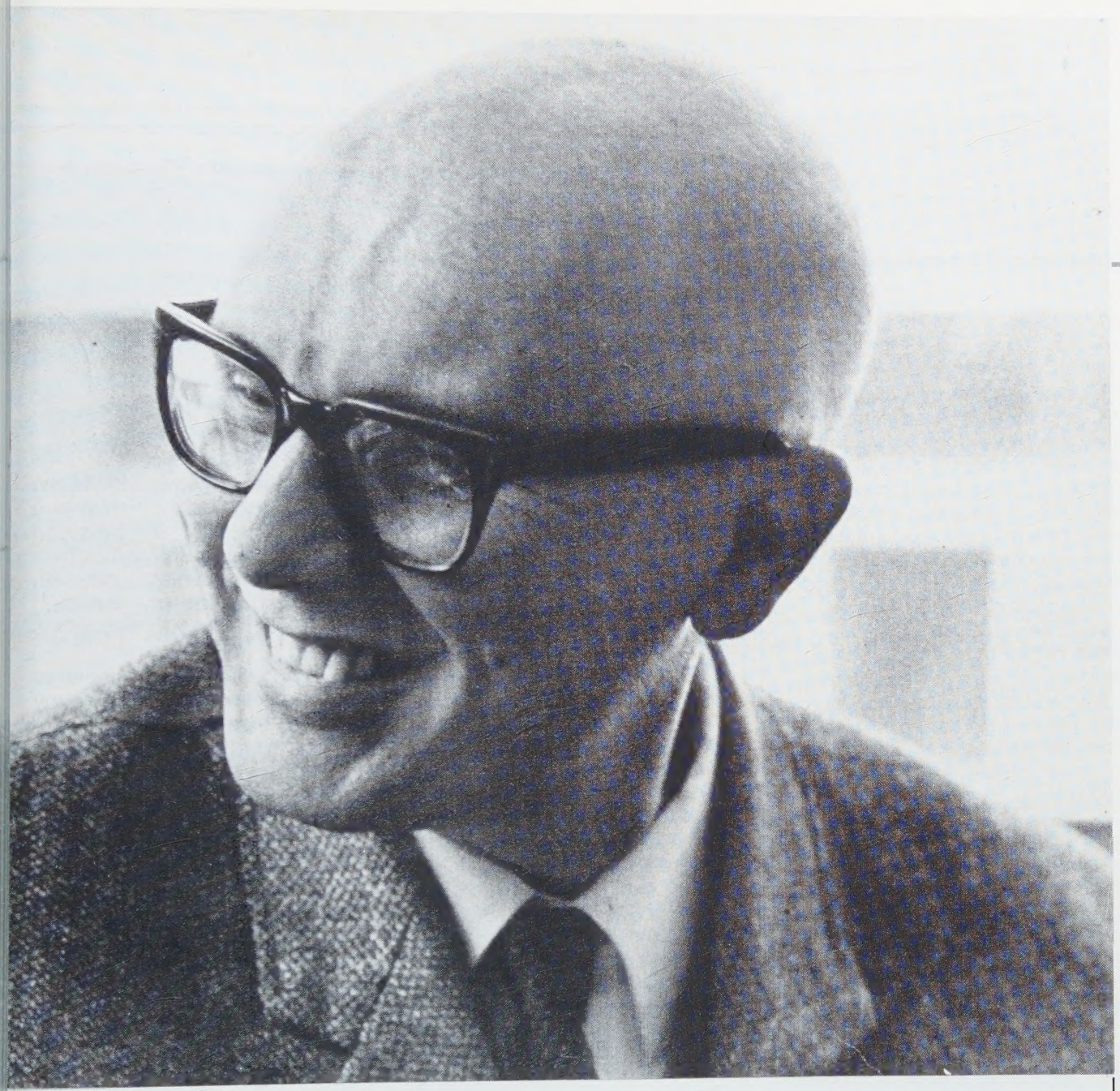
"If you are bringing your offering . . ."

The silence was complete. Of the many, many people gathered in the small cemetery of Rocca di Papa no one uttered a word; no one moved. It was Cesare's funeral. The delicate sound of young voices rose in song "...when I arrive at your door..." He had arrived; he had passed that door. The singing continued, "...wherever you are, life blossoms anew..." Cesare is alive! People crowd around his coffin, singing, listening, lost in deep thought, all deeply involved. I think of Cesare, of his constant smile, of his deep eyes which had reflected so much suffering. Yet he had always given everybody courage, he was always available and joyful. And this is typical of those who can always give because they love and keep nothing for themselves.

Suddenly I remembered something Cesare had triumphantly told me one day as though he had won a battle. I wonder why I recalled that particular event among so many others. He had attended a meeting in which he had heard the Gospel sentence, "If you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering" (Mt.5:23-24).

For years Cesare and his family had not been on speaking terms with the janitor of their apartment building because of quarrels and disagreements they had had in the past. Several times a day they passed the glass-paneled door of his office but to them it was part of the wall; what was worse, each time they went by, the old resentment came back in their hearts and with it the determination not even to look in that direction.

Now that sentence of the Gospel threw Cesare's soul into turmoil. He knew he couldn't go on living that way any more. That very day as he passed by the janitor's door he knocked. The janitor's wife looked up, her face like stone. Without wasting any words, Cesare said, "Forgive us, we haven't exchanged any greetings with your family and you for so many years, and yet we thought we were Christians. We were convinced we had so many reasons for acting like that but today I realized I can't be a Christian unless I love everybody. I came to understand it just today, so I am asking you to forgive me; let's make peace."



Cesare Negrini

The woman, whose reaction had changed from aloofness to amazement, called her husband to tell him about it. Then she went to the cupboard and, almost trembling, took out some glasses and poured wine to celebrate the joyous event.

I remember how he shared another event of those days. He had ordered a piece of furniture but when it was not what he had wanted, Cesare returned to the store, loudly confronted the owner, and left abruptly, slamming the door. After making peace with the janitor he felt he also had to visit the furniture store. When he went back, the owner was talking to a client. Cesare felt his heart bounce; he had forgotten all the words he was going to say. So he turned to the one who had said that fateful sentence, "If ... go and be reconciled first..." (Mt. 5:23-24), and asked him for help. Hesitantly, he approached the man, who turned around and looked at Cesare with a friendly face, not even recognizing him. So Cesare blurted out all in one breath, "I'm the guy who had ordered that piece of furniture but then didn't want it and slammed the door. I know now it wasn't right, because that's not the way a Christian should act. I'm sorry."

The furniture man looked at him in surprise, then gave him a cordial pat on the back and told him to forget about it. He even invited Cesare for a cup of coffee, but Cesare could not stay. He thanked the man, said so long and ran, full of joy, to the nearest church to 'leave his offering'....

Doriana Zamboni

(Continued from page 2)

He was the son of a high ranking officer in the Fascist militia who, having been wounded and captured during the war in North Africa and then transferred to India, was eventually sent back home in a prisoner exchange. While on convalescent leave in Rome, he was accidentally killed by a partisan bomb as he was passing by the Hotel Flora, which at the time was the headquarters of the military tribunal. It was a terrible blow for Cesare who, partly because of his own previous political views and partly out of loyalty to the moral heritage left by his father, felt even more strongly committed to the Fascist ideology. His army unit was to operate together with a German unit in Bolzano, in Northern Italy. But being unable to take the shattering experience of the work assigned to him, he left. He was caught and charged with desertion and put in Rome's Regina Coeli Prison. From there, after many tribulations and complications he joined a Fascist battalion which was assigned to fight the partisan guerillas in Piedmont. Taken prisoner by the partisans, he was about to be executed. "I told them I was a Fascist and that I was ready to give my life for my beliefs," he wrote in a letter. "Then they took me away to be shot. As the truck which was to carry me to execution had already started to move, I was saved by one of their officers who told me to get off. So I jumped off the moving truck and ran."

After the war his political credo remained unshaken and even grew stronger. He wrote: "Because of the grief over the

We asked Chiara and Lucia, two of Cesare Negrini's daughters, to talk to us about their relationship with him.

"I LEARNED FROM HIM HOW TO SHED MY FEARS."

"That evening of February 28, I was coming home rather tired but happy. I had spent the whole afternoon with a dear friend. So when my sister opened the door before I even had a chance to ring the bell and told me, 'Daddy is dead,' I couldn't really believe it. 'It's impossible,' I told myself. Then came the pain, a pain so great that I cannot express it in words.

"Never again would I be able to hug my father; never again would I hear his laughter when he was in a happy mood, nor would I see him irritated, nor listen to his words, nor talk to him about myself. For I hadn't merely lost the man who had physically given me life, I had lost a true father.

"The relationship I had had with him was very special. It is easy, on occasions like this, to recall only the positive things. However, I remember just as clearly the difficult moments, the clashes between us, our different points of view, the tension. We both had rather strong personalities: he had a tendency to be authoritarian, while I was anything but submissive, and wouldn't accept ideas that were too traditional for my taste. In time, having to face and overcome these hard moments together, we built a truly strong relationship.

"Dad, in fact, was strong yet he was always ready for a dialogue, always ready to admit that he could be wrong, to believe in the possibility of starting over again. He was always open to the new, to the young; he was in love with love and with life. I instead must have hurt him sometimes with my withdrawn attitude, with the assertion of my independence that led me to decide everything by myself.

"I learned from him how to shed my fears and overcome my withdrawn personality. It eventually came to me spontaneously to share with him my joys, my doubts, my moments of pain, my choices. I always found him happy to listen and talk to me; to give me advice and encouragement not only as a friend, but as a father.

"I could say so much more and recall particular episodes of our life together, but I will mention just one thing that is most prominent at this time, as I face his death. It is difficult to express the depth of my grief, yet it is equally hard to express the sense of peace and serenity that filled my heart immediately, even in the midst of tears. I felt right away that Dad was close to me, and that I would be living with him always. My life has changed. I experience now a bond with a reality that transcends the human condition. 'Down here' and 'up there' are now for me one reality assuming different aspects. They have one law in common however: love, that is given and received, cannot die. Neither can the love between my father and me die — not now or ever."

Chiara Negrini

Cesare and Antonietta in 1949, when they were still engaged.

A BEAUTIFUL DIALOGUE

"One of the things that impressed me about my father was his humility in admitting his errors and his readiness to start all over again when he was wrong or lost his patience. He had a forceful personality. This caused our relationship during my teenage years and first years of college to be marred by arguments and disagreements. Yet, we were bound by a deep affection which went far beyond these difficulties.

"We often had moments of deep understanding, times in which we were able to share our most intimate thoughts, discoveries, our most beautiful experiences. I could tell him about my difficulties, my disappointments, my defeats, and he would understand me completely. He would give me advice which, I knew, was not just words but the fruit of his life.

"The last month of his life was very special. I felt that it was more important for me to stay with him rather than study or go out with my friends. I remember the day I heard he was to come home from the hospital, I immediately decided that I would be the one to pick him up, even though I had a lot of homework to do. It was a lovely day, and I took him a bouquet of flowers. That day I wanted to live only for him.

"As I met him at the hospital, we were both in a festive mood. We helped one another carry his overnight bag, had a cup of coffee together, and took the bus and subway home. We laughed together and he talked to me about the time he was young. There was a festive air at home, too, and we were overjoyed to be all together again. There were flowers on the table, and we talked and laughed, all five of us. In the evening we all celebrated my mother's birthday.

"During the night, Dad and I found ourselves in the kitchen, as neither of us could sleep. He noticed that I had something on my mind and asked me what I was thinking about. We talked until two o'clock in the morning. It was the most beautiful dialogue I ever had with him."

Lucia Negrini

loss of my father, because of the hardships I endured, and because of the pain of seeing my country trodden upon and despised by all, and also as a mere reaction, I threw myself into a reckless life. I felt that no matter what I did, it was of no use.... In the immediate postwar period I joined an underground Fascist group but had to leave after a few months because of the brute obedience I was subjected to, and also because I was expected to accomplish actions which were contrary to my conscience."

That was the point of no return of a negative experience of a moment of anguished reflections. It was also the occasion for an appointment with God. It was the moment when Antonietta, Cesare's future wife, entered his life and with her a new way of valuing both his personal life and the events around him.

He wrote: "The truth is that within me a crisis had been developing and maturing which would later be resolved by God. It was the contrast between the law of love of the Gospel which allows for the exclusion of no one, not even the enemy, and on the other hand, my attachment to a particular ideal which implied fighting all political adversaries and even inflicting grave injury."

In those days with Antonietta he found himself listening to new words and taking new steps which were not easy, but were definitely leading toward a different choice. He added, "We went to Communion together every day. From then on, my soul opened up to a greater Love, a Love that embraced all,

without limits or barriers of any kind.... My chauvinistic attachment to my homeland here on earth gave way to love for the heavenly home where the Father has prepared a place for each of his children, so that all may be 'one' in him."

Cesare had always been and, in a new way, continued to be a strong, almost violent person. From the violence of his former actions and intentions he now passed to the "violence of the Gospel" which he truly lived. It was a violence precisely against himself, a violence which is necessary in order to "storm heaven"[1]. Just as he had translated his political ideology into life, now he tried to translate the demanding Gospel message into life. He continues, "As time progressed I better understood the words of the Gospel: 'God is light; there is no darkness in him at all. If we say that we are in union with God while we are living in darkness, we are lying because we are not living the truth' (1 Jn.1:5-6). I realized the danger of losing that light if I were not in the truth. Thus, with the help of my brothers, since I

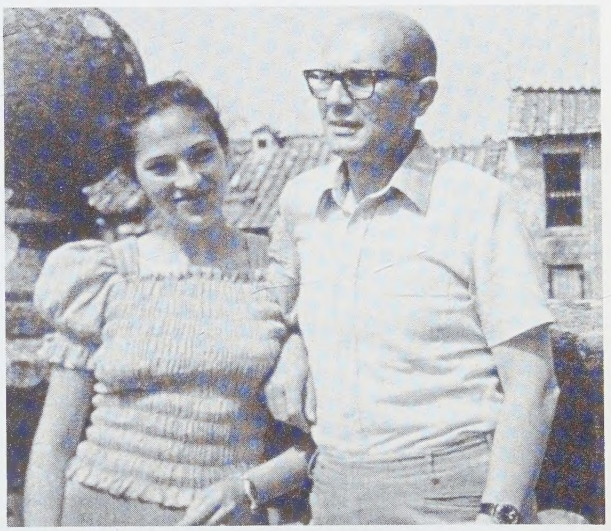
Cesare Negrini with his wife Antonietta and their three small daughters Maria, Lucia and Chiara when they were still little girls. Later a son, Nando, was born.

couldn't have done it by myself, I felt it was my duty to make peace with all those toward whom I had lacked charity in the past."

In the meantime Cesare had married Antonietta; he was going regularly to the Focolare Center[2] and becoming more and more convinced that all was vanity of vanities, and that only that life taught by the Gospel was essential. He entered the dimension of the pure of heart, which is the goal of a true Christian. One day he meditated on the words of Jesus, "He who loves his father, his mother, wife and children more than he loves me, is not worthy of me." He was troubled by these words, for he did want to be a good husband and a good father, but he also wanted to be totally in line with the Gospel, to be at peace with God.

He adds: "I remember one evening, on my way home, that I strongly felt how much my heart was divided between God and his creatures. I felt all the sadness of not being entirely his, and so I made my choice: God only. God in my neighbor, God in my wife and in my children. Everything changed meaning and from that moment on I did everything — the same things I really used to do before, but with a new spirit — that is, with the desire to do them only for the will of God. Thus I learned to love my family by loving Jesus in them. Together with the focolarini[3] — for, having chosen God as they had done, I am a focolarino too — I make every effort to keep mutual love among us and put in common all the spiritual and material goods which the Eternal Father is lavishing on me."

One of the most recent photographs of Cesare Negrini with his daughter Maria who is now married and with children.



The last years of Cesare's life were marked by a great desire for moral perfection. For some time he had been aware of having a heart condition, but his was a serene sense of acceptance. Having freed himself from the fear that torments those souls who have not received help in achieving such freedom, he directed all his hopes on the certainty that God is Love. "If we love God, everything else serves a purpose and nothing is lost. Another thing I definitely learned is that love drives away fear and that to those who have embraced love, fear becomes a fault."

There was a time when Cesare experienced a slackening of spiritual thrust; he attributed it to his infidelity to the Gospel. In a letter to Chiara Lubich he wrote, "Every morning at Mass I pray that I may die before committing mortal sin. I ask him with you to break my heart but to let me always follow him. If I happen to turn back even a few steps — for the "old man"[4] is always on the lookout — I ask Jesus to give me so much suffering that I can make up for the time I have wasted."

In regard to availability requested of all married focolarini, that is, to be ready to move with their families to other cities or even to other countries as the need may arise, Cesare wrote to Chiara: "Had I been told ten years ago, I would have had no problem. Now that my heart is acting up occasionally, I am confronted with the anxiety of not making it. Last night I realized that I have aged, not so much in years as inside, within my soul. How much longer will I live? What does it matter? I feel deep in my soul that in spite of my nothingness my life is always his, and that I want to finish it on this earth by loving more and more, according to his will, in every place, in every moment, in every person...." □

1) Cf. Mt. 11:12; 2) See inside back cover; 3) See inside back cover; 4) cf. Col. 3:10.

THE HERITAGE OF VINOBA

Vinoba Bhave, the spiritual heir of Ghandhi, died during the last Hindu "Feast of Lights." He was the leader of a great movement for fair land distribution.

by ROBERTO CATALANO

For the Hindu people, Diwali is the most important holiday of the year. It is a celebration of light, held in late October or early November, with festive illumination and displays of fireworks.

But the Diwali of 1982 loomed heavy with forebodings of a less than happy time, as dark shadows gathered over the Indian horizon. In addition to the usual scourges of destitution and illiteracy, there were political troubles which appeared more menacing than ever. The Congress Party showed wide rifts in its ranks. Many of the States traditionally faithful to Indira Gandhi were breaking away. Party members were involved in scandals; public opinion, unreliable by nature, seemed to be more than ever subject to manipulation. Religious minorities demanded greater autonomy. In the Punjab,[1] the Sikhs[2] requested a free State; the clans in the northwest insisted on a level of guerilla warfare that exhausted the regular military forces. Even the Asiatic Sports Games in Delhi turned out to be an exhibition of polemics rather than of festivities among the youth. The death of Brezhnev cast a large shadow over Moscow -New Delhi relations. "Will the Kremlin continue to see Delhi as a friend?" was the question making the rounds in the press and diplomatic circles.

Yet, as the Diwali approached, some looked forward to it as to a ray of light, a remembrance of the years when Gandhi, the Mahatma, used to walk the streets of this immense country, preaching *ahimsa* (peace). It was at that point that the news came out in the daily press: "Vinoba on Hunger Strike at 87!" "Vinoba Refuses Food and Drink!" "After Four Days Vinoba Still Alive!" But the miracle was shortlived. Vinoba Bhave, Gandhi's spiritual heir, the man whom Lanza del Vasto considered "the best-loved man on the Indian subcontinent," died after six days of fasting which he had unfortunately begun just one day after having a heart attack. And he died during the Diwali, the Feast of Lights. For a whole week all of India — or at least that twenty percent of the population which is reached by the mass media — looked toward Paunar, near Nagpur, in the area of Maharashtra in the State of Bombay, where Vinoba had lived for the last few years. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi rushed to his funeral from Moscow, where she had been attending the funeral of Brezhnev. Thousands of people, some of them former followers of Gandhi who had lost a good many of their illusions, people from the big cities and "untouch-

Vinoba Bhave, "the best-loved man of the Indian subcontinent." After India's independence, he launched a program of social action through agrarian land reform to be carried out on the principle of "strength derived from truth and love."

ables" (whom Gandhi renamed *Harigans* — the children of God) from the village outskirts, came from all corners to attend the cremation and strewing of ashes of the Acharaya, the Master, as all of India used to call him.

The name Vinoba, given to him by the Mahatma himself, is a diminutive of Vinayak, the name he had received at his birth on September 11, 1895. His family came from Maharashtranon, quite far from Bombay, and his last name, Bhave, indicates that he belonged to the noble caste of Brahmins or priests who are known to be of pure, aristocratic blood, of irreproachable morals, leading a life of piety and having a great love for God, the Absolute.

Vinoba was fond of telling this story: As a boy, he had one day said to his mother: "There is a man over there who is asking for alms. But giving alms means encouraging idleness and sloth in these people." Then he quoted from the Geeta, the holy book, to support his attitude. And his mother answered: "The beggar who is asking for alms is God himself. Would you treat God as someone undeserving of your help? Who do you think you are? How can you make such distinctions? As far as I am concerned, there is no doubt about it. For me he is God." And Vinoba concluded: "To this day, I have found nothing I could dispute in what she said."

The early part of this century was marked by the awakening of the Nationalist Movement in India. Strong resentment and hostility towards the English was felt everywhere. Vinoba, too, felt his blood boil at the colonialists' exploitation of his country and at the recruitment of his countrymen who were sent to be butchered in the imperial wars of her Majesty, Great Britain, or paid to collaborate in the oppression and in the brutal treatment of their own peoples. What was he to do? It seemed an absurdity to have been educated, to have learned the language of the oppressors, and to have studied in London. For what? Only to be used as their instruments? Vinayak clenched his teeth and decided to persevere. "I must learn their technique and beat them at their own game," he said.

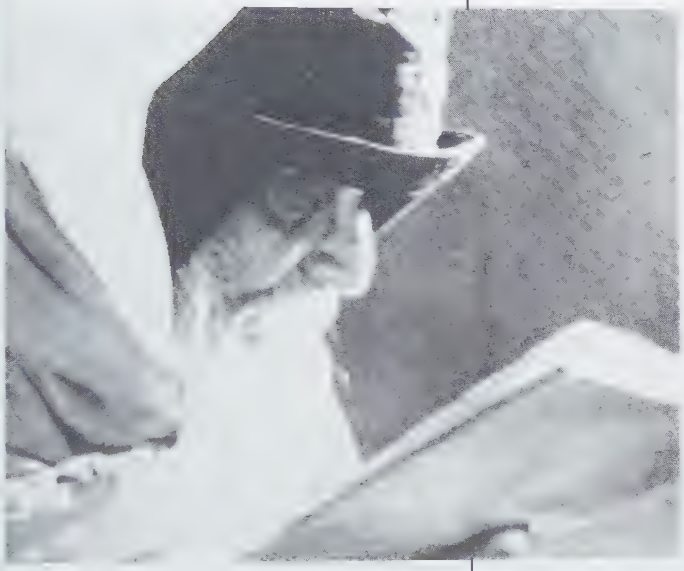
Then he met Gandhi. The year was 1916. The Mahatma was already famous for the Movement of Nonviolence which he had founded in South Africa. Vinoba, who at twenty one, had already made a vow of celibacy eleven years before, went to see

RIGHT: Vinoba in prayer. He had covered over 37,000 miles on foot in order to carry out his peaceful mission of social justice in rural India, where 600,000 villages house 85 per cent of the population.

BELOW: Vinoba speaks to a crowd of farmers during his pilgrimage from one village to another to launch a great movement for the distribution of untilled land.

The following meditation was written by Chiara Lubich when Vinoba's influence as a spiritual leader was becoming increasingly well-known.

TO BE



him in his *ashram*[3] at Sabarmati in the State of Gujarat, north of Bombay, where the apostle of peace had been born. It was an encounter that changed his life forever, and it all took place within a few minutes. No sooner had he entered the enclosure of the ashram then he saw the Mahatma himself, half-naked, and sitting at a spinning wheel. "Do you want to pursue the English with a weapon like that?" the young man exclaimed, pointing to the spindle. Gandhi liked Vinoba's bold demeanor and answered in a like tone of voice: "There is no need to pursue the English. They will leave of their own free will once we have eliminated the ills that really oppress us. My son, I hope that you won't confuse the English with our real troubles. At the very least, don't make the mistake of hating them!"

Gandhi knew that the true evil plaguing the Indian people lay in the many schisms that were dividing them into different communities, castes and religions.

I have had the opportunity of getting to know something about Vinoba Bhave, the Indian who, basing himself on the word of Christ "Love your neighbor as yourself," has succeeded in founding and spreading a movement among tens of millions of people in India, who share out their land.

But more than this fact, which in itself is wonderful and astonishing, there is the impact of the man himself.

He reminded me so much of Patriarch Athenagoras, the Ecumenical Patriarch.

Vinoba is right to say: what matters is 'to be'. 'To be' means for him 'to be God' — by participation that is. And Vinoba must be full of God since so many people run to see him, eager to observe a living holiness that is difficult to deny.

The way he stands, the way he moves, the simplest and most minute acts, his silence — say as much as his words. The faces surrounding him express an inner silent joy, a reflection of the spiritual richness that he possesses. I have seen the same joy on the faces of people around Athenagoras, who often come from his study moved to tears.

Vinoba and Athenagoras are both very close to humanity, to each person, yet it takes only a moment to realize that they already live beyond this world. And these are not just words.

This 'to be' is what most attracts every Christian who has the adventure of meeting people of this calibre. And such an experience irresistably leads us to imitate so great a reality. This is why whoever knows the way of holiness passionately turns again to the asceticism it requires — to live in God in the present moment of life. In this way we are completely separated from everything that is not God and immersed in God wherever he is present. Then our life is no longer 'existing', but fully 'being', because God, he who is, *is* in it.

And this is the life that suits the Christian, the real son of God.

What happens then is that living is a continual word, ever teaching, even if immersed in deepest silence. It could be said that when we speak of God we simply speak, but when we live like this, even if we do not speak, we shout about him.

Vinoba is right when he emphasizes *the action of inaction*. His formula M2A, two meditations to one action, is beautiful. We can translate it as MA, meditation and action the whole day, whether we speak or whether we are silent.

The remarkable thing is that we are describing two personalities of the present-day world which is ruled over by the myth of activism.

This gives us a lot of hope.

From the book
Yes, Yes
No, No
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"The greatest of our evils" he said, "goes back a long, long time. It is division. Division between Hindus and Moslems, between rich and poor, between classes, between those belonging to a high caste and the pariah."

The solution proposed by the Master was implicit in what he was to say later on: "What does division mean if not an absence of love? And the absence of love means death and corruption. Let us therefore learn how to love, and the English will leave of their own accord. As long as nonviolence remains our only weapon, I have no doubt as to the outcome of this battle, for love is all powerful. Indeed, Love is God. Therefore, we shall win in the end."

It was this overwhelming experience that wiped out all the hatred in Vinoba's heart. The twenty-one-year old Brahmin decided to stay with the prophet in his ashram. In no time, he, who was of the purest, noblest blood, found himself washing dishes in the kitchen. A few weeks later he was cleaning the lavatories, the kind of work usually left to the pariah or to those living at the outskirts of the villages so that the "pure" would not be contaminated.

The Master, meanwhile, wrote to the young man's parents: "Don't worry about your Vinayak. He is staying with me. He has attained a spiritual perfection which I have been unable to reach in spite of many years of hard effort." And one day when an old friend and follower of the pacifist leader came by to see him and asked who "that young man" was, Gandhi told him, "He is one of the rare pearls of our ashram, one of those who came not to be blessed, but to bless; not to receive, but to give."

That Vinoba was his most beloved disciple was clear, especially at the beginning of the Second World War in 1940, when Gandhi launched the Movement of Nonviolent Noncooperation. He and his disciples went about speaking of "peace" in public and inviting the people to join in a peaceful boycott of all British initiatives. His most authoritative representatives were Vinoba and Jawaharlal Nehru.

"Every war," said Vinoba,"and this one in particular, is a crime, aggravated by stupidity. Indeed it is hard to say what is more terrifying: the horror of the massacre or the stupidity behind it."

The British police did not appreciate this manner of speaking and so Vinoba was arrested, like many other members of the Movement, and had to sit out the duration of hostilities in her Majesty's British jails. Then, just a few years later, came independence, the fulfillment of India's long yearned-for dream. It was also the precise moment when the work of spreading love throughout the country had to begin.

It was a task of immense proportions, with problems that seemed insurmountable: illiteracy, the necessity of uplifting the lower classes and the outcasts, the frightening social imbalance, the huge land ownerships, and the blood bath following India's division with Pakistan.... The Mahatma was committed to bringing about peace between Hindus and Moslems but his untiring efforts seemed to be belied by the daily massacres on one side or the other. His fasts, his prayers and his travels were of no avail.

"I could state with 100 percent accuracy," he confided to a friend, "that my present mission is the most difficult one of my life. The night is dark and I am far from home. 'Do, guide me, Lord'." A few days later his ashes were strewn into the Ganges. Hatred had put a weapon into the hands of a fanatic who used it against the apostle of peace.

His inheritance fell onto the shoulders of Vinoba, the Acharaya, the Master. All considered him to be the spiritual heir of the little man in white who had lived for love. The other heir, a political one, Jawaharlal Nehru, was in New Delhi, engaged in obtaining a place among the nations of the world for India.

Vinoba founded Sarvodaya Samaj, the Assembly for the Good of All, and followers of Gandhi saw him as the "Master" and joined him. Yet, given the inequality of Indian society, daring to speak of love was almost scandalous, especially in rural India (600 thousand villages which were housing eighty-five percent of the population at the time independence was achieved, due to the large land holdings). It was thus that, in 1951, the Bhoodan Yajna, or decree for a fair distribution of the land, came about. The Acharaya himself took on the task of promoting the new cause and, in the span of a few years, covered about 37,000 miles on foot, walking from village to village.

"The land is like the air, the rain and the sun," he proclaimed. "It belongs to all because it

ABOVE: Vinoba, with one of his closest collaborators at his side, walks through the crowds of farmers, preaching social reform through the creation of Gramdan, cooperative rural communities. Fifteen out of the seventeen Indian states, and as many as 100,000 villages responded to his mission.

belongs to no one but God himself who created it. I know that there are some among you who own more land than they and their children can cultivate. They are hindering the free circulation of goods." As a result of his words, quite a large amount of land was relinquished and put at his disposal. However only one-fourth of it proved suitable for cultivation and could be redistributed. The rest remained uncultivated.

Little by little, a feeling of mistrust began to seep into the ranks of the Movement; regrettably, some of its members were acting out of personal interest. Thus, the mission of Vinoba remained unfulfilled and the shadow of this suffering darkened the last days of his life, a life which had been completely devoted to God and to his people.

What then is the heritage of Vinoba? The writings of a visionary? The unfulfilled dreams of a disillusioned pacifist? No, it is something more — something that the world of today sees as folly, but that attracted thousands of people at his death. It is his experience of God which stays with us. This has become our rich inheritance, the inheritance of all of humanity. Just before breathing his last, Vinoba said, "I am already in the Infinite." □

1) A former province in Northwest India.
2) Members of a Hindu religious sect founded in the Punjab c.1500 by the guru Nanek.
3) A place in which Hindus meet for religious instruction or exercises in common.

MOVING TOWARD ONE BIG FAMILY

by TOMMASO SORGI

A prophetic message launched twenty years ago and still unfulfilled in spite of the commitment of many.

It was April 11, twenty years ago, the day that marked the publication of *Pacem in Terris*, the encyclical which the late Mayor of Florence and great Catholic thinker Giorgio la Pira called "the new world manifesto."

It was a document that had a world-wide echo like no other Church document in our time. The acclaim, which was particularly warm among the nonbelievers, showed that John XXIII, "the kind pope," had a deep knowledge of the world situation and of its anxieties, and that he knew how to guide humanity on the road toward new hope — the hope most cherished by all men of every race and of every faith on earth.

The encyclical was officially addressed to the Assembly of the United Nations, who therefore listened to a message based primarily on the norms of reason and of natural law. It was, however, proclaimed by a priest, a successor of the Apostles, and rested on a declaration of faith in

The era in which the encyclical **Pacem in Terris** *was issued was a historical moment characterized by three men — Pope John XXIII, John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev. Each of the three men was a charasmatic personality in his own way, and each originated a radical innovation in his country and in the world: the Second Vatican Council, the "New Frontier," and de-Stalinization.*

God and in Christ, Prince of Peace. Thus, the evangelical message reached the leaders of peoples and nations beyond the cultural areas more or less inspired by Christianity, and it was as though the vision of the Psalm was being realized for the first time in 2000 years: "Their voice is heard all over the earth, and their word reaches all the confines of the world" (Psalm 18/5).

What had happened to make the world pay so much attention and listen with so much wonder and gratitude to this long letter written by a pope? I would like to point to three possible reasons: the encyclical's historical relevance, its new style, and several specific points in its content.

The historical moment in which it appeared was particularly alive with hope and ideals, due to the influence of three people — John F. Kennedy, Nikita Khrushchev and John XXIII — each, in his own way, a charismatic personality. The world was electrified by the prospects of radical innovation—the "New Frontiers", de-Stalinization, and the Second Vatican Council.

That era was also marked by anxiety triggered by the Russian missile crisis in Cuba, which just barely escaped a head-on clash of the two superpowers and their nuclear arsenals. There was severe danger and burning disappointment. And what little hope there was left for peace and for a truly new beginning now lay with the one of the three who had no political or military power but who more and more stunned the world with his fresh moral authority. Those short years were not stagnating in today's dark realism; they were pulsating with enthusiasm and with faith in an ideal.

The style of this papal document presented at least two novelties. Up to that time, encyclicals were circular letters which the Pope used to send to his co-bishops. But already with his previous encyclical "Mater et Magistra", John XXIII had broken tradition by addressing it to the entire clergy and to all the faithful as well. Now, with *Pacem in Terris*, he went one step further: with a wide sweep beyond the confines of Christianity, he addressed his letter to "all men of good will."

Appeals of this kind had already been launched by other popes and particularly by Pius XII in his Christmas radio messages of 1941 and 1954. This time, however, it was an official explicit opening of a dialogue with nonbelievers, who were surprised and flattered by this, to

them entirely new, attention. The other novelty is given by the angle or point of view of this encyclical, which I would call the first "lay encyclical" (later followed by *Populorum Progressio* and *Laborem Exercens*). The lay characteristic lies in the fact that all arguments are conducted with references to natural law and in the light of human reason. The theological reference is of course in evidence, and in a very fundamental way, yet it is introduced with such a delicate discretion, that it appears to be brought up in support of the human—not to dispel it, but to give it absolute prominence.

Hence the origin of some specific aspects and points contained in the encyclical, which enabled even the faithful of the great religions to make this document their own. It was, among other things, set to music by a Jewish composer, and its title was adopted by an institute founded by the Socialist leader Pietro Nenni. Among these specific points which gave this document a universal value, is its emphasis on mankind as totality, its intent to dignify man as a whole, purify his every capacity, give him great potential, great freedom in every way, and a great sense of order and progress. It affirms the dignity of every human being and reminds the believers that there is great truth and honesty in the nonbelievers, in whom "God never ceases to be at work."

It certainly does speak of peace, in the form of disarmament, in the form of a dialogue and justice among nations; it points to the irrationality of war as a means of resolving issues. But it primarily speaks of peace in the positive sense, indicating the ways of achieving a just coexistence of politically divided people as well as communities in the framework of one large human family.

Peace must be constructed and protected by individuals and peoples living together in truth, in justice, in love, and in freedom. Peace is the fruit of a right concept of authority, of a correct use of power for the good of all nations and of the world.

There are many references to the juridical safeguard of the rights and the liberty of individuals (often pointing to the solid doctrine of Pius XII), and there is a strong demand for the creation of a single world authority installed by a consensus of all the nations.

In *Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII acknowledges and hails the new recognition of human dignity and of the rights, particularly of the working classes, of women, of formerly subjugated nations (the famous "signs of our time"). He looks forward to institutions which will allow a wide and active participation, and the exercise of responsibility in all fields of endeavor.

But there are also passages which, at the time, raised many an eyebrow and almost created controversy. These are the references to certain social and political movements born out of false doctrines which, says the encyclical, "remain unchanged and unacceptable." But the movements themselves may have undergone changes and evolutions and ended up by containing "positive elements, worthy of approval." Catholics may find occasions for "encounters and agreements" with them "in various sectors of the temporal order." With the due prudence, these may lead to a cooperation of a "practical nature" among persons directly involved in social issues which, however, must safeguard the principles of natural law and remain in agreement with the social doctrine of the Church and with the directives of Church authority.

It was a significant opening of a political nature which caused some alarm even in Catholic circles. Shortly before the encyclical was launched, John XXIII received in audience Khrushchev's son-in-law Adjubei.

Rumor had it, in a half-facetious, half-serious way, that, had it been necessery, John XXIII would have gone even to the Kremlin.

That season, which was imbued with so many strange aromas, has passed. The work of Pope Roncalli, however, not only remained, but was continued and developed by the Council and by the Popes who succeeded him. The problems have become tougher, but that encyclical on peace deserves to be read again by believers and nonbelievers alike. It is still there to point the way for all to place themselves above the limitations of everyday local problems in order to envision points of contact between opposite shores and recognize some universal truths.

They are still there, these foundations for a more ample vision of world problems and their solutions. The need for this encyclical is still felt by all of us, whatever our race or faith may be. □

St. Bonaventure
the "word" of St. Francis

by ATTILIO STENDARDI

Gilson described him as "the second founder" of the Franciscan Movement. St. Bonaventure remains very relevant in thought and witness 750 years after his canonization.

Today the pilgrims who flock to St. Peter's Square in Rome on Sunday for the *Angelus* would hardly think of connecting this prayer with Bonaventure of Bagnoregio. Yet it was this man who spread the devotion and recommended its use to the Friars of the Franciscan Order at their General Chapter in 1260. It was also on this occasion that the "definitive" Constitutions of the Order were approved.

The practice of ringing bells to call people to pray was introduced by St. Francis of Assisi, around the year 1220. While in the Holy Land, he had met the Sultan of Egypt and from him learned of the Muslim custom of gathering people to prayer five times a day by calling them from the top of the minaret. Saint Francis, duly impressed, decided to have bells rung three times a day in all the churches of his Order. This practice quickly spread and soon the sound of ringing bells was heard throughout Christendom. In such practical and simple ways, the Franciscan Order left its mark on the outward forms of Christian practice.

But the source of the Franciscans' influence is the example of its finest followers. One of the greatest of the Order is St. Bonaventure. Today, he embodies the complete definition of the Franciscan Movement: "he thought out what St. Francis had only felt and lived."[1] "The teaching of St. Bonaventure marks the culminating point of Christian mysticism and constitutes the most complete synthesis that has ever been made."[2]

His name was Giovanni Fidanza, and he grew up in a flourishing town in Northern Italy which was a center of commerce and industry, around the year 1221. His father was a wealthy doctor and it was due to his wealth that the young Giovanni could go to Paris to study. The young boy had experienced a miraculous recovery from a serious infantile disease, through the invervention of Saint Francis. His mother, in thanksgiving, entrusted her child to the protection of the Friars Minor.

He went to Paris around 1237 and according to chronicles of the time, was befriended by the outstanding scholar Alexander of Hales. This latter, on seeing the young Italian boy, exclaimed: "In him perhaps Adam did not sin, so pronounced is the mark of innocence on his face." In 1248 Bonaventure already occupied the Franciscan Chair at the University of Paris, though it was not until later that he was accorded the title of Magister, with Thomas Aquinas.

Meanwhile, in 1243, he entered the Seraphic Order and became a full-fledged member, taking the name of Bonaventure. The name meant, for him, not so much a "good omen," but was a sign of the maturity of his choice and the total dedication with which he consecrated himself to God: "the first of adventures."

After a mere fourteen years in the Order, at the age of 36, in the year 1257, he was elected Minister General, a charge which he retained until 1274, when he was obliged to resign it because of his appointment as Bishop of

Albano by Pope Gregory X who at the same time created him Cardinal. However, despite his retirement from the generalate, he still had a strenuous life and he was not strong by nature. Within a year of his change of office, he took part in the Second Ecumenical Council of Lyons (France) and rapidly became exhausted. He suddenly died on July 15, at the age of only 56 (or thereabouts). The Pope and the entire Council of Cardinals attended his funeral. He was buried in the Church of Saint Francis at Lyons. On April 14th, 1482, Pope Sixtus IV declared him a saint, and a "Principal Doctor of the Latin Church."

Obviously it would be impossible to enter at any great length into the works and thought of such a giant of Christianity in a short article. However, a few remarks might indicate the relevance today of St. Bonaventure's thought as given to us in his writings.

Bongerol, one of the leading authorities on Bonaventure's teaching, states that to acquaint oneself with an author, "one must, before all, go back to the setting in which he lived and the courses which inspired him." He goes on to say that "Bonaventure belongs wholly to the Franciscan setting ... and the body of his writings, the outcome of immense personal toil, can be regarded as the peak of Franciscan scholastic tradition . . . It was he who effected the synthesis of Franciscan thought."[3]

In other words, Saint Bonaventure's writings in philospohy, theology and mysticism follow the same journey as St. Francis did in the course of his life; he starts from God and returns to God — or better, to the God who is Trinity.

St. Bonaventure's best-known work of mystical theology, the *Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum (The Soul's Journey to God)*, after presenting the premises of fallen nature and of the indispensable journey (or itinerary) to be travelled in Christ the Redeemer, develops this thought in three "ways": the purgative, the illuminative and the unitive, each with its own special characteristics. One element is very relevant to modern life: the central value of the Eucharist for attaining the unitive stage. Saint Bonaventure states that, "the Eucharist gives strength for action, raises to contemplation, disposes for the revelation of divine things, encourages and enkindles contempt of the world and the desire for celestial and eternal things."[4] He concludes with a stirring invitation: "If then you feel empty, ask to be filled in this Sacrament which hides beneath the figure of corn; if you are hungry, ask for your allowance of bread; if you observe that you are blind and in darkness, ask for light in this Sacrament ... if you feel that you are in the shadow of death, seek your reconciliation in this Sacrament, beneath the figure of the Paschal Lamb."[5]

St. Bonaventure provides answers to the questions which have arisen over the centuries about the Franciscan Movement. The poverty of St. Francis has been badly misunderstood by those outside the Franciscan Movement for many, many years. Dante, the poet, was the first to misinterpret it in terms of his opposition to the papacy and the roman curia which at that time was not expressive of evangelical poverty. Dante did adhere faithfully to Franciscan sources and especially to the writings of St. Bonaventure, but basically his concern was poetic and so his interpretation should not be judged in other terms.

Marxist historians have also misinterpreted the Franciscan concept of poverty."Marxist, research into the Middle Ages analyzes the Franciscan phenomenon in accordance with sociolog-

Italian Government Travel Office

La Civita, near Bagnoregio (Viterbo) in Italy, the birthplace of St. Bonaventure.

ical criteria. It thus hails Francis as the forerunner who publicizes non-possession, and foreshadows a new proletarian ideal."[6]

In the 19th Century, there appeared yet another misconception — the romantic view of Francis and Clare as two people in love. It failed to add with whom they were in love.

St. Bonaventure's definition of Franciscan Poverty echoes unambiguously down the ages: Francis and his followers "read without interruption by day and by night, the book of Christ's Cross, turning over the pages again and again, taught by the example and the words of their Father, who continually spoke to them of the Cross of Christ."[7]

For St. Bonaventure, poverty and humility are the indispensable conditions for the radical choice of "being" as opposed to "having." Franciscans do indeed exemplify the social dimensions of poverty — the freedom from material attachments so that one can decide in a detached way, be in charge of one's own destiny before God and history. But in Francis of Assisi such poverty was in itself the possibility of choosing God — as All. Having made that choice, Francis turned to men and to all creatures, with his soul and heart flooded by the loving Fatherhood of God. And it is herein that there is to be found the social nature of the Gospel as well as all the other virtues which accompany the following of the "One Master" (the title of one of his key works) and were typical of the suffering Christ. This could also be the starting point for an examination of Bonaventure's humanism, which according to some has yet to be studied in depth. Through the Poverty of St. Francis can be found the wisdom of the Cross on which Bonaventure bases his whole spiritual and speculative approach.

Yet for all his theological insight and mystical wisdom, when a brother asked St. Bonaventure if it was possible to love God even if one lacked adequate culture and learning, the Saint's reply was simple and straightforward: "An old woman who loves God with all her heart can attain to sanctity better than any Doctor of the Church . . ."

And some people maintain that the mystics are mere abstract thinkers! □

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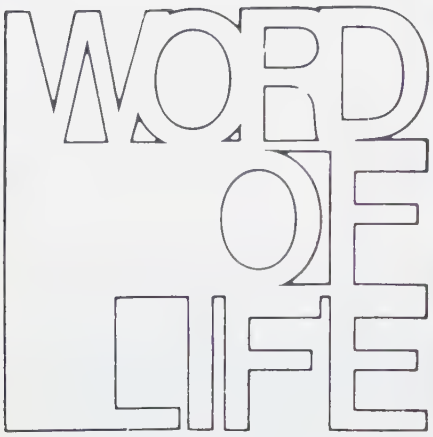
1) E. Gilson, *La Philosophie de S. Bonaventure*, Paris 1924, page 69.
2) Ibid, page 472.
3) J. Guy Bougerol, *Introduction a' L'Etude de San Bonaventure*, Desclee et Cie, Tournai, 1961, page 9.
4) *Sermo 3 de Corpore Christi*, n. 13.
5) Ibid, n. 12.
6) P.J. Cordes, *Da San Francesco a Charles de Foucauld*, *Osservatore Romano*, 4/5 Oct. 1982, page 6.
7) *Legenda maior*, IV, 3.



"When you have done all you have been commanded to do, say, 'We are useless servants. We have done no more than our duty'."
(Lk. 17:10)

The word makes us live.

The word makes us free.

The word guarantees happiness.

The word converts.

The word purifies us.

The word draws us to our specific vocations.

The word brings forth the hatred of the world and the sanctity of the disciple.

The word makes us see the truth.

The word brings comfort.

The word gives us joy.

The word produces works.

The word gives wisdom.

The word preserves us from human concerns.

The word obtains everything.

The word brings about union with God.

The word gives us hope of eternal life.

The word makes us one.

The word changes one's mentality.

The word makes each soul a heaven.

"When you have done all you have been commanded to do, say, 'We are useless servants. We have done no more than our duty'."

Jesus calls our attention to the fact that a master never tells a servant who returns from work, "Come and sit down at table." He is more likely to order the servant to prepare food and serve it to him. The master has no obligation towards the servant when the latter has simply done his duty.

At the conclusion of this parable Jesus says:

"When you have done all you have been commanded to do, say, 'We are useless servants. We have done no more than our duty'."

The relationship between God and us is certainly not the same as that between master and slave. In fact, in another case, Jesus said that the master himself will serve his faithful servants.

Here Jesus does not mean in any way that our actions are useless or that they have no value before God. He has high regard for our work and considers it worthy of recompense.

So the message that Jesus gives us through these words is, rather, that in our relationship with God, we should not lose sight of his greatness and our total dependence upon him.

"When you have done all you have been commanded to do, say, 'We are useless servants. We have done no more than our duty'."

God is all and we are nothing; this is the difference between God and us. Only the acknowledgement of this truth puts things in their proper perspective and helps us to give God the glory that we owe him. In fact, the best way to tell someone "you are great" is to affirm one's own small measure.

At times we are tempted to feel proud and deserving of recompense because of having done our duty. However, it is in putting ourselves in our proper place, i.e. before the truth, empty of our ego in every moment of our life, that we can open ourselves completely to God and be ready to receive his love. By doing this, we participate in his glory and richness; we attain full happiness and fulfill ourselves as human beings.

"When you have done all you have been commanded to do, say, 'We are useless servants. We have done no more than our duty'."

How then can we live this word of life? By loving in a genuine and selfless way; by loving without thinking that having done all we could we are entitled to a reward; by loving always, focusing only on God, whom we love — loving him for himself and loving him in our neighbor; by loving God, not to be rewarded, but, rather, because we want to be similar to him who is love.

Chiara Lubich

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers have shared with us.

MY ROLE AS A DOCTOR

I am a doctor and I work in a hospital which cares for patients with terminal diseases.

One day I went around to see the patients in my charge and ask them if they had any problems or questions to ask me. I came to one man who was blind and I asked him if he had any difficulties. He answered:"None." I was about to pass on to the next patient, relieved in a way, when I was struck by the thought that I had really not loved this man at all.

"Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant"(Mk.10:43) was the word of live that we were living. It was too easy to discharge my duty of service to this man by just asking him a few questions. I made a conscious effort to put aside my role as a doctor and started to chat with him about the different things he enjoyed doing. He told me that he really enjoyed horse racing and "putting a few dollars on a horse."

I borrowed a newspaper from another patient and spent half an hour reading out the horses that were running that day and which ones were the favorites.

He was really happy, and whereas previously he had been quite depressed, he became cheerful and we even joked about going out to place a bet.

I passed on to the next patient. Within two hours my old friend had become unconscious, and he died quite suddenly as a result of the disease which had left him blind. I was very startled by this and I realized in a very deep way how much I had to love each patient, really as if it might be the last person to love them on this earth.

R.L.

MOMENTS OF UNITY

My sister-in-law and her husband had been wanting to have a baby for quite some time. One month we were living the word of life "If two of you join your voices on earth to pray for anything whatever, it shall be granted you by my Father in heaven. Where two or three are gathered in my name there am I in their midst" (Mt. 18:19-20). I shared with my sister-in-law, who also receives the word of life, what a beautiful opportunity it was to ask the Father for the gift of a child. She thanked me for mentioning this and said she would pray with her husband for this intention.

After a month and a half my sister-in-law received the news that she was pregnant. She was so excited and thankful and told me what faith and prayers had done. I was happy for her and knew that my prayers also had been answered. It was a moment of close unity between us.

Two days later I received a phone call from her. She seemed very upset and unable to talk. In those few moments of silence I experienced a fear of her telling me that she had lost the baby. But immediately the word of life came to mind: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted," (Mt. 5:4). I knew Jesus was giving me an opportunity to embrace this suffering and that in so doing I would be able to comfort my sister-in-law who would need me. I felt at peace and was able to control my own emotions and listen to what she was about to tell me.

She proceeded to tell me that she was experiencing some problems and was afraid and didn't know what to do. I tried to calm her down so that she could tell me what the problem was. As she spoke I realized that it was nothing too serious, but since this was her first child they were problems that she didn't know how to handle. In talking to her I assured her that everything was normal but I encouraged her to call her doctor so that he could ease her mind. She did call her doctor and later called me and thanked me for just being there for her.

E. B.

BUENOS DIAS MIGUEL!

Anyone, even if they live in an isolated mountain village, far from civilization, can understand and speak the language of love.

compiled by FIORE UNGARO

Unbelievable! It's my first job and I'm already in trouble. I must have read the letter of appointment a hundred times, "Teaching position in the town of N." I can hardly read its name on the map. It's a little village hidden in the mountains, in the poorest zone of my country.

I don't even have time to get used to the idea of leaving. My mother insists on accompanying me. It is useless to protest. I hate to see her undertake such a trip, and then there will be all the difficulties to be encountered there. On the other hand, I cannot deny that her presence will be of help.

Now that she has joined me in packing, I feel calmer. After all, refusing to accept the position would not be consistent with the choice I have made for my life, nor with my efforts to comply with them. Those poor people are waiting for me.

After the train ride and six more hours of bouncing up and down in a bus, we finally arrive. Waiting at the station for us is a brown-complexioned man whose troubled and emaciated face has been darkened by the sun. He introduces himself,"I am Ramon, señorita. I have come to show you the way." Then he takes the heaviest suitcase. We walk for two hours along a path which is barely outlined on the arid ground. My eyes glance around in search of some sign of life, such as a house, animals, or something, but I see only bushes and sky. Now the road becomes inclined, and then steeper and steeper. My concern is for my mother who is in front of me climbing the road without complaining. We arrive at the top of the mountain at dusk. Up there on a little plateau is an old building, a real shanty. That is the school. All around is still desert. "Where is the village?" I ask Ramon who hasn't opened his mouth for the duration of the trip. He points out a few huts made of straw and leaves, scattered here and there.

The squalor of that sight has the effect of a cold shower, ridding my body of every bit of fatigue. We put ourselves up as best we can in one room of the school (I have to get used to calling it a school). There are no beds, but we can use old planks from the benches; these we cover with straw. Perhaps... we are indeed better off here than the people in the village; we are protected by four stone walls.

Tomorrow I want to tour and visit all the huts.

These people are suspicious and they have reason to be. Who am I for them? The teacher. It is ridiculous. They don't need a teacher. I have come into their huts made of cactus and straw and I have seen what they need. I have seen babies lying in holes in the ground to be kept warm. No electric lights. No running water; only rain water if the heavens send it. For food, four cups of dry corn, a few potatoes and beans laboriously cultivated on a piece of hard land, minuscule in size. Yet in the last hut a woman whose face is wrinkled with age, puts a tiny packet of seeds into my hand. "If you plow the ground behind the school, you can raise something," she says with a coarse voice. I almost embrace her; she is the only one who has spoken to me today. The others didn't even

look me in the face. And they are right! From their point of view an abyss divides us. They see me neatly dressed; my hands have neither stains nor callouses. Words are useless even though they do come from my heart. It is life which will unit us.

While visiting the huts, I casually give an invitation to everyone to meet Thursday night in front of the school. Probably nobody will come.

Thursday. One woman comes. Attached to her skirt are her two youngest children, small, skinny, but with beautiful black eyes. Maria, the lady, asks me, "Will you teach the children?"
"Certainly," I answered, "beginning tomorrow if you wish. I have cleaned the classroom. Would you like to see it?"

During these days I have been working day and night, painting old benches, doors, windows. On the squalid walls I have hung animated drawings. Pablo and Melitta stand with mouths open; they observe everything without detaching themselves from their mother.

"Do you like it, children?" Maria asks, caressing them with tenderness and melancholy. Then she says good-bye and confirms that they will come tomorrow.

Tonight I cannot sleep; I count the hours. Two children! I am here at the end of the world for two children. It is strange, but I feel puzzled and happy at the same time. "Where two or more..." In the darkness I think of this promise of Jesus, "I will be among them."

"The people in the village are suspicious of me and they have reason to be. Who am I to them?"

UN Photo

Pablo and Melitta spread the word that the school is nice. Not even a week has gone by and the others have come in clusters. In spite of everything, the mothers send them without too much resistence, because it's hard to live for twenty-four hours all crowded in a small hut.

Now they are all here. There are about twenty, ranging in age from four to ten. I haven't even opened my suitcase containing my books on pedagogy and methodology. There is no use consulting these books in this situation. The lessons must be invented each day for every student individually.

It seems incredible, but two months have already passed. With the children it is getting better and better. I don't know who is more "teacher," they or I. I need to get to know these people, and the children teach me words, idioms, customs, beliefs, legends. I listen to everything, and I myself am beginning to use their "familiar" language to explain everything. They call me by my first name and I like it.

Yesterday I went with the children to drink from the springs flowing from the mountains behind the huts. It is springtime now and the snow of the glaciers is melting. As usual I have my science lesson out in the open air. It seems important to me to climb with the children up the steep rocks of the tall mountains, to run with them, to get wet like them, in other words, to become a part of this nature here. Then the children are more willing to listen to me. They ask me questions because they see me love the same things.

Today Manolo, one of my students, has been quiet and sad all day. I want to accompany him home to see what is going on there. I know that in his tiny humid hut there are five people living in extreme poverty.

I find his father lying on a mat on the floor. His face is purplish as he coughs violently, almost to the point of suffocating. I think he is seriously ill.

"I'm going down to the city to call a doctor," I tell his wife. She objects, "No, señorita. It has been raining for three days and the road is muddy and dangerous." I give the impression of yielding in order to pacify her, but within myself I don't give up. I descend the mountain, clinging with hands and feet to bushes and rocks, sometimes rolling down a few ledges but I am only slightly bruised and scratched.

Before night the doctor enters Manolo's hut, visits the patient and orders his immediate hospitalization. During the night two male nurses come up to the village and take Manolo's father down the mountain to the hospital. It will be a long period of hospitalization. His wife Pilar tells me, "We will die of hunger before he does." She is desperate. I remain with her all night to comfort her. Finally, exhausted, she falls asleep for a few hours.

In the morning, I am back at school. I speak to the children, saying,"We must help Manolo's family." It sounds like a crazy thing to ask of these emaciated children who have nothing to give. They all answer yes. I say nothing else except when I remind them of the words of Jesus,"Give and it will be given to you." He said these words to

people who were also poor, to fishermen.

Then I speak with my mother and she agrees with me; we can share our food and the little bit of money we have with Manolo's family. I begin visiting Pilar every day to take her some food for the family. I keep her company for awhile; she asks me how I am, and she is sincerely concerned about me. She asks if I have eaten, if I am very tired. It is amazing to see how people in such a dramatic situation can still love.

Also the children give evidence of this. Every day now they

leave potatoes, corn, small bags of flour at my desk. These things are not just for Manolo's family anymore; they are also for Carlos' family in which there are seven children, or for Florencia's mother who has the fever, or for Miguel whose mother is going to have a new baby. The most beautiful thing is that Carlos, Florencia and Miguel bring something also, maybe just a handful of beans or a few leaves to repair the hut. Though small, it is the beginning of the process of circulating goods. The families imitate the children. Carmen's mother told me today,"It's really interesting; the more we give, the more we receive." With extreme sacrifice she had given a small corn muffin to her child to bring to the school's bank for the poor, and then she had seen the child return home with a bag of potatoes.

Yesterday I taught the first lesson in hygiene for adults, out in the open, in front of the school. Since I had established a personal relationship with almost everybody, I could teach such a class. I spoke without referring to anybody in particular, with discretion and with very simple words. We chose a date, for the next lesson. Today the children arrived with clean faces and hands.

"Now they are all here. There are about twenty, ranging in age from four to ten. I haven't even opened my suitcase containing my books of pedagogy and methodology."

During the evening Marta comes to tell me,"Consuelo is dying. Run." I rush there, but on arriving, we no longer hear Consuelo's cries during the delivery; we hear only the new baby's wailing. Consuelo does not breath anymore. She had been very sick carrying the family's burden alone while her husband was working in the fields from dawn until night.

I feel powerless at the sight of so much desolation. I wash and dress the baby in silence while people arrive from the other huts. We pray at length, but I feel that I have to take another step. I approach Francisco, the husband, and tell him,"From tomorrow on, if you want, my mother and I can keep the children during the day, and you can pick them up at night." He looks at me with eys red from weeping, and nods yes without speaking. On my way back home I keep thinking of Consuelo. I ask her to intercede for her children, her people, the school.

Morning has come. In front of the school, sitting on the steps is Miguel who doesn't know anything about the death of his mother or the birth of his new brother. With his sparrow-like legs he runs towards me, saying, "Buenos dias, buenos dias." "Buenos dias, Miguel," I answer, picking him up and taking him inside. □

Images FOR words

"My last words
I address to you
as a prayer . . .
namely that you
cherish concord,
having but one heart
and
one will."

Angela Merici

At home, at work

Diary of Louise

Saturday: My 2½ year old daughter has been very demanding today. She seemed not to listen to what I was telling her to do which was to put her toys away. I was becoming very angry inside and was just about to yell at her when she looked at me with her deep brown eyes. Then I remembered to love Jesus in her. Immediately I changed my attitude thinking of the word of life: "Nothing that goes into a man from outside can make him unclean; it is the things that come out of a man that make him unclean" (Mk. 7:15). I stooped down and started putting her toys away. Within a few moments, she came over and kissed me and began to help me. It was a very joyous moment.

Monday: I have planned a trip to Los Angeles to see a friend in September. My secretaries at work know that I am taking off two days to do so.

One of my secretaries asked me if we had considered adding a fourth bedroom since we had a third baby this year. Being very honest, I told her that we would like to, but could not afford it. She then said "If you would stop flying around you could."

I wanted to tell her that she did not know how important this trip was. But I remembered the new word of life we had just started to live: "And if your foot should cause you to sin, cut it off; it is better to enter into life lame, than to have two feet and be thrown into Gehenna" (Mk. 9:45). So, instead of answering back I responded in a loving way. I don't think she really understood, but she knows that I did love her and did not react. Only love remained.

Wednesday: Today I returned to my office after the trip to Los Angeles. I asked my secretary how things went while I was gone. And five minutes later she was still griping and complaining. I knew I had to make myself one with her. I wanted to tell her to shut up, but I knew that I could not. I was very sympathetic and listened with my whole heart knowing that if she had the faith I felt in my heart she would be able to accept those trials. So I loved her taking on her suffering and in making it mine. I was able to really understand what she had gone through. Our bond was closer.

Thursday: One of my secretaries told me that she was offered a position with another company, but decided not to take it. I did not give it much thought, although I was curious as to the identity of the company. Later I found out that it was the husband of a former secretary. I was furious! I wanted to call this person and really tell him and his wife off. But I remembered the word of life and could not do that. I had to love them. I had to cut and go onto the next moment. But it hurt, it really hurt. I thought I had it under control; but then I went to a luncheon and she was there. I could not see her with new eyes. But once again the word of life was very strong. I knew that I could not say anything about this. I tried instead to really love her. It was hard but I embraced the suffering and the only thing that remained was my love. I am still hurt, but I also feel such a joy that I was able to love her and not create an ugly scene.

Monday: Today as I was preparing to go to the office to do some extra work and clear up some paper work one of my daughters started to cry and wanted to go with me. She asked me to please take her. I knew that if I took her I would not get anything done, but I also knew that I could not leave her crying like that. Once again it was a new month and the word of life was on the refrigerator "Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant"(Mk. 10:43). I remembered that I had to be ready to serve. I asked my daughter if she wanted to go to the store and she said yes and became very happy. We went to the store and bought what we needed and after coming home I asked her if I could go to work. She gave me a big kiss and said, "Sure, Mommy."

Tuesday: After dinner I wanted to just relax and do nothing, but I found that my husband was also exhausted and that he also planned to relax that evening. I was upset and angry inside and wanted to pout! But as I was clearing the table I remembered the word of life about being a servant. I immediately changed my attitude and my actions be-

came acts of love. The hundredfold was the inner peace I felt in knowing I had loved.

Wednesday: Tonight since I was having a meeting at our house, I asked my husband to please keep the three children quiet. I told our two-and-a-half-year-old child, to please be good and explained to her that we were having a meeting and she had to be quiet. Everything went very well for the first half hour, but then my oldest came out and wanted to be held. I was upset because I thought I had failed in disciplining and teaching my children to behave. I wanted to send her to the back of the house, but I had to decide which would be more love and I remembered that I should love concretely and be ready to serve. I told her I would hold her and asked her to please be quiet. She was the best she had ever been. Her presence was not a distraction and she was happy to be with me. It was such a beautiful experience of unity between me and my child.

Thursday: This morning at work my new secretary of three and a half weeks told me she was quitting. I was hurt! And then she told me she was leaving that day and not giving a two-week notice. I was so upset, that I left the office and went down the hall for a few moments and tried to calm myself down inside. I was very hurt, but I had to forgive her; I had to love her! In fact, I had to be her servant. I returned to the office and told her that I was happy for her and hoped that she would be happy in her new job. I asked her what I could do to help her. I felt an inner peace and joy from not exploding. It really gave me a freedom from my anger and made our last few hours together an enjoyable experience.

Friday: Another one of my secretaries has decided to quit work since she doesn't need to work financially. We are looking for her replacement and I have to conduct the testing and the interviews. Some of the applicants who came in today could not even pass the typing test. I knew I could not be hard on them but I had to decline them gently. It was a real suffering for me because I do not like turning people down. Thinking of the cross, I was able to embrace this suffering and still feel a peace inside. In living the present moment I was also able to cut and go on to the next present moment without brooding on the previous incident.

Monday: Today things were repeatedly going wrong at the office, one after another. I wanted to quit right on the spot myself! I went to the ladies' room and locked the door. I told Jesus how hard it was and that I could not continue any further. I was ready to throw in the towel. But a peace, a very deep peace came over me as I could see Jesus carrying his cross and then dying for me. I then cried because knew if he could die for me, if he could suffer the ultimate suffering on the cross, that I could handle any suffering, with his grace. I returned to the office, smiling and ready to embrace each suffering because of my faith and love of Jesus.

Tuesday: When I arrived at the office, one of my secretaries was in a very bad mood. She was quiet and almost pouting. At first I thought to myself "too bad!" I wasn't going to act like it bothered me, then I tried to make her laugh. Then I realized that I wasn't making myself one with her, but rather trying to change her to my way. I remembered the word of life "Go; your faith has saved you" (Mk. 10:52). I prayed and was also quiet, not rude, or evasive, but just quiet in making myself one with her.

About two or three hours later, slowly she started to come out of her shell and I realized how strong our unity was because I loved her the way she wanted to be loved.

Later on my former secretary invited me to her home for lunch. I knew I could not say no. But I also knew it would be a difficult time for myself since we had had our differences in the past. However, now I wanted to live the present moment, and see her with new eyes. I prayed before going and really made myself one with her and talked about the things she wanted to talk about. The lunch time was a beautiful experience. I know this was because I loved her and made myself one with her. Also because I saw her with new eyes.

What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

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